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ABSTRACT

In 1974, 1979, and 1986, the Bureau of Justice Statistics sponsored surveys of nationally representative samples of inmates of state correctional facilities. Results from the 1986 Survey of Inmates of State Correctional Facilities which included 13,711 inmates, indicated that inmates reported high levels of drug use prior to the commission of the crime for which they were incarcerated. In the month before their current offense, 43% of state prison inmates were using illegal drugs on a daily or near daily basis; 19% were using a major drug on a daily basis. Many inmates began their use of drugs, particularly major drugs (heroin, methadone, cocaine, phencyclidine, or lysergic acid diethaylamide), after their criminal careers had already started. Almost 80% had used drugs at some time in their lives; 52% had used a major drug. White inmates and female inmates were somewhat more likely than others to have been regular users of major drugs. About 65% of inmates reported that they had never been regular users of a major drug, and an additional 21% began such regular use after their first arrest. The greater the offender's use of major drugs, the more prior convictions the inmate reported. Users of major drugs were substantially more likely than nonusers to report that they received income from illegal activiuies during the time they were last free. Twenty-eight percent of inmates reported a past drug dependency. Thirty percent reported that they had participated in a drug treatment program at some time. About one-half of the inmates who had participated in a program had received their most recent treatment while they were incarcerated. Seventeen tables illustrate the report's statistics. (ABL)

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State Prison Inmate Survey, 1986

Drug Use and Crime

by Christopher A. Innes, Ph.D.
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July 1988

Results from the 1986 Survey of Inmates of State Correctional Facilities indicate that inmates report high levels of drug use prior to the commission of the crime for which they were incarcerated. In the month before their current offense, 43% of State prison inmates were using illegal drugs on a daily or near daily basis; 19% were using a major drug--heroin, methadone, cocaine, PCP, or LSD--on a daily or near daily basis.

Many inmates, however, began to use drugs, particularly major drugs, only after their criminal careers had already started. Half of inmates who had ever used a major drug and three-fifths of those who had ever used a major drug regularly did not do so until after their first arrest.

Other findings include the following:

- In 1986, 35% of State prison inmates reported that they were under the influence of drugs at the time they committed their current offense, compared with 32% in the 1979 survey.
- Inmates were more likely to report they were under the influence of cocaine but less likely to report using heroin at the time of the offense than in earlier surveys. Marijuana or hashish was the drug most frequently used at the time of the offense.
- Almost 80% of inmates had used drugs at some time in their lives; 52% had used a major drug.

This Special Report examines the links between illegal drug use and criminal activity among State prison inmates in the period before they were incarcerated. Past studies have shown that a high degree of drug use is common among offenders. This report expands our understanding of the relationship between drugs and crime by examining in greater detail the histories of drug use and addiction among State prisoners, their employment patterns, and their participation in drug treatment programs.

The report, based upon data from the 1986 survey of State prison inmates, should be of use to criminal justice policymakers, practitioners, and researchers. We gratefully acknowledge the cooperation of State prison officials who made the survey possible.

Steven R. Schlesinger
Director

- White inmates and female inmates were somewhat more likely than others to have been regular users of major drugs at some time in the past.
- Among State prison inmates who had used drugs, about half began their use by age 15.
- A large majority of inmates (81%) were not daily users of a major drug in the month before the offense for which they were sentenced to prison. About one-seventh (13%) of inmates seem to fit the pattern of drug addicts who committed crimes for gain.
- About 65% of inmates reported that they had never been regular users of a major drug, and an additional 21% began such regular use after their first arrest.
- Of State prisoners who were sentenced for robbery, burglary, larceny, or a drug offense, half were daily drug users, and about 40% were under the influence of an illegal drug at the time they committed the crime. These proportions were higher than those reported by inmates convicted of other crimes.
- The greater an offender's use of major drugs, the more prior convictions the inmate reported: Less than 13% of those who had never used a major drug had six or more prior convictions, compared to nearly 30% of daily users of major drugs.
- Users of major drugs were substantially more likely than nonusers to report that they received income from illegal activities during the time they were last free (48% vs. 10%).
- Twenty-eight percent of inmates reported a past drug dependency. The drugs most frequently mentioned were heroin (14%), cocaine (10%), and marijuana or hashish (9%).
- Thirty percent of inmates reported that they had participated in a drug treatment program at some time--12% more than once. About half of the inmates who had participated in a program had received their most recent treatment while they were incarcerated.

Introduction

In 1974, 1979, and 1986, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) sponsored surveys of nationally representative samples of inmates of State correctional facilities. The Census Bureau carried out the data collection in each survey. Inmates interviewed totaled 9,040 in 1974, 11,937 in 1979, and 13,711 in 1986. In each survey, inmates were asked about their background, employment, criminal history, and drug and alcohol use and, in 1986, about their victims.[1] (For details of sampling and estimation, see Methodology.)

This report, based primarily on the 1986 survey, examines the relationship between drug use and criminal behavior. A previous report using the 1986 data indicated that the extensive criminal histories many prison inmates report are often matched by equally long histories of drug use.[2] Drug use among inmates ranged in seriousness from occasional past use to daily use in the month prior to committing their current offense. A second dimension of the seriousness of an offender's drug use involved the type of drug used. In this report, heroin, methadone, cocaine, LSD, and PCP are classified as major drugs based on their addictive nature, high cost, and the legal penalties for their use and sale. The distinction between "major" and "other" drugs is made for analytical purposes and is not meant to imply that use of "other" drugs is not also a serious problem.

The past involvement by prison inmates in the use of drugs or alcohol has also been found in previous surveys of inmates and in tests of persons arrested.[3] The level of drug use particularly appears to far exceed that reported by the general population.[4] This implies that the illegal use of drugs is frequently associated with other types of criminal activity, such as robbery and burglary.

[1]For analysis of previous inmate surveys, see Profile of State Prison Inmates, LEAA National Prisoner Statistics Special Report, NCJ-58257, August 1979; Prisons and Prisoners BJS Bulletin, NCJ-80697, January 1982; Examining Recidivism, BJS Special Report, NCJ-96501, February 1985.

[2]See Profile of State Prison Inmates, 1986, BJS Special Report, NCJ-109926, January 1988.

[3]See Prisoners and Alcohol, BJS Bulletin, NCJ-86223, January 1983; Prisoners and Drugs, BJS Bulletin, NCJ-87575, March 1983; National Institute of Justice, NIJ Reports, no. 208 (March/April 1988), pp. 8-9.

[4]See Report to the Nation on Crime and Justice: Second Edition, Bureau of Justice Statistics, NCJ-105506, March 1988, p. 50; National Survey of Drug Abuse: Main Findings, 1982 (Washington, D.C.: National Institute on Drug Abuse, 1983).

Concern over the use of drugs and a belief that such use leads to criminal activity has long been an issue in American society. Even before Federal legislation was enacted in 1914 to control narcotics and other drugs, observers had noted the apparent association of drug use with criminal activity.[5] Drug abuse was believed to encourage criminal behavior in several ways. It reduces inhibitions or stimulates aggression and interferes with the ability to earn legitimate income. Further, laws to control drugs and the subsequent emergence of illegal trafficking may directly increase crime because persons who develop a dependence on an illegal drug need a substantial income to pay the higher black market prices for them. In addition, crimes such as extortion, aggravated assault, and homicide are frequent byproducts of illegal drug trafficking.

An alternative view of the relationship between drugs and crime holds that drug use does not directly cause criminal behavior, but the same circumstances that might lead a person to begin committing crimes may also contribute to the development of drug habits. For example, social conditions, including poverty and discrimination, may limit opportunity and reduce an individual's investment in society, leading to both drug abuse and criminal behavior. Also, some people enjoy taking risks and are willing, for whatever reason, to violate laws or norms, or they seek possessions or experiences that are not available by legitimate means. The use of drugs, especially on a regular basis, may not occur among such persons until after they have begun a career of criminal activity. Drug use may thus be only part of a more general lifestyle that also includes other types of criminal activity.

[5]H. Wayne Morgan, Drugs in America: A Social History, 1800-1980 (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1981).

The BJS inmate surveys provide a substantial body of data for assessing the nature of the relationship between crime and drug use. The following analysis examines in detail the reports given by prison inmates of their drug use histories and the onset of drug use relative to the beginning of criminal careers. This analysis indicates that for some prison inmates drug use began prior to other criminal activity and may have contributed, either by lowering inhibitions or by generating a need for money, to a developing criminal career. For many others, drug use, particularly regular use of a major drug, started only after their criminal careers had begun.

Patterns of drug use before current incarceration

Inmates in State prisons reported a relatively high level of drug use prior to their current incarceration. In 1986 more than a third of the inmates reported that they were under the influence of a drug when they committed their current offense (table 1). This is similar to the level reported in the 1979 inmate survey, but it is noticeably higher than that found in 1974. Marijuana or hashish was the most frequently mentioned illegal drug in recent surveys, but significant shifts have occurred among the major drugs.[6] Inmates in 1986 more often reported that they were under the influence of cocaine, while in 1979 heroin was the major drug most often mentioned.

[6]Hashish is a derivative of marijuana, containing the same active ingredient, THC.

Table 1. State prison inmates under the influence of drugs, by type of drug at the time of the current offense, 1974, 1979, and 1986

Type of drug	Percent of all inmates who were under the influence of a drug at the time of the offense		
	1974	1979	1986
Any drug	25.3%	32.3%	35.4%
Major drug			
Cocaine	1.0%	4.6%	10.7%
Heroin	16.2	8.7	7.0
PCP	--	2.3	2.2
LSD	--	2.0	1.6
Methadone	1.7	.7	.8
Other drug			
Marijuana or hashish	10.3%	17.6%	18.6%
Amphetamines	5.3	5.2	4.2
Barbiturates	5.5	5.7	3.3
Methaqualone	--	--	1.6
Other drugs	3.0	1.6	3.9

Note: Individual drugs may not add to total under "any drug" because an inmate may have been under the influence of more than one drug.
--Indicates that the drug was not asked about in that year.

Inmates also reported varying levels of drug involvement, ranging from never using any drug to daily use of at least one of the illegal drugs in the month before the current offense. Although a fifth of State prison inmates reported no use of any illegal drug, four-fifths did report such use, and almost two-thirds said they had used an illegal drug regularly in the past (table 2). (Regular use is defined in the survey as use of a drug at least once a week for a month.) Over half (52.3%) had used at least one drug in the month before the current offense, and 42.6% were using it on a daily or near daily basis. These patterns differed slightly by race, with whites more likely to report daily use than blacks or members of other races. Males were also more likely to report regular use and daily use than were females when all drugs are considered.

Examining the pattern of major drug use provides a different picture. These drugs--heroin, methadone, cocaine, LSD, and PCP--are the ones most often mentioned as contributing to other criminal activity. More than half of the inmates had used a major drug sometime in the past, and 36% had used one on a regular basis. Among all inmates, 25% reported using a major drug in the month before the current offense, and 19% said they were using one or more of the major drugs on a daily basis in that month. White inmates were still more likely than blacks and those of other races to report use of a major drug. Female inmates, however, were more likely than males to report use when the questions were limited only to the major drugs. Nearly 30% of female inmates reported use of a major drug in the month before their offense, and almost a quarter said they were using one or more major drugs on a daily basis.

Table 2. Drug use history of State prison inmates, by race and sex, 1986

	Percent of all inmates who:				
		Used drugs			
	Never used drugs	Anytime in the past	Regularly in the past	In the month before the offense: At all	Daily
Any drug[a]	20.4%	79.6%	63.4%	52.3%	42.6%
Race					
White	20.0%	80.1%	65.0%	53.9%	44.8%
Black	20.8	79.2	62.0	50.9	40.7
Other	19.8	80.1	62.8	49.8	38.8
Sex					
Male	20.0%	80.0%	63.8%	52.6%	42.8%
Female	28.0	72.0	57.8	47.0	39.3
Major drug[b]	47.6%	52.4%	35.8%	24.7%	18.6%
Race					
White	43.2%	56.8%	38.9%	26.5%	19.3%
Black	52.5	47.6	32.7	23.0	17.9
Other	44.1	55.9	35.1	24.0	17.5
Sex					
Male	47.7%	52.3%	35.8%	24.5%	18.3%
Female	46.1	53.9	40.0	29.6	24.3

[a]Includes major drugs (see note b) and marijuana or hashish, amphetamines, barbiturates, methaqualone, and all other drugs.

[b]Includes cocaine, heroin, PCP, LSD, and methadone.

Table 3. Drug use by State prison inmates, by conviction offense, 1986

Conviction offense*	Percent of inmates convicted of each offense who: Were under the influence of a drug at the time of the offense	Had used a drug daily in the month before the offense
All offenses	35.3%	42.7%
Violent offenses	33.4%	39.2%
Murder	28.3	34.1
Manslaughter	20.0	23.4
Rape	32.0	34.3
Sexual assault	24.9	24.5
Robbery	41.9	50.3
Assault	28.6	34.4
Kidnaping	37.2	44.3
Other violent offenses	31.8	31.0
Property offenses	38.7%	48.4%
Burglary	42.8	52.3
Arson	30.6	39.1
Auto theft	33.6	46.0
Fraud	29.2	37.8
Larceny	39.1	49.2
Stolen property	29.7	42.9
Other property offenses	33.4	32.1
Drug offenses	42.7%	51.4%
Possession	42.8	49.6
Trafficking	42.3	52.4
Other drug offenses	49.6	51.0
Public-order offenses	25.1%	33.3%
Weapons	19.4	26.8
Other public-order offenses	27.2	35.8
Other offenses	26.7%	25.3%

*Most serious offense for which the inmate was sentenced to prison.

Examining the pattern of major drug use provides a different picture. These drugs--heroin, methadone, cocaine, LSD, and PCP--are the ones most often mentioned as contributing to other criminal activity. More than half of the inmates had used a major drug sometime in the past, and 36% had used one on a regular basis. Among all inmates, 25% reported using a major drug in the month before the current offense, and 19% said they were using one or more of the major drugs on a daily basis in that month. White inmates were still more likely than blacks and those of other races to report use of a major drug. Female inmates, however, were more likely than males to report use when the questions were limited only to the major drugs. Nearly 30% of female inmates reported use of a major drug in the month before their offense, and almost a quarter said they were using one or more major drugs on a daily basis.

Drug use and current offense

The most serious drug users, inmates who were under the influence of drugs at the time of the offense or reported daily use of drugs, were most likely to have committed a crime for gain (table 3). More than 4 in 10 inmates serving sentences for robbery or burglary were under the influence of an illegal drug, and over half of each group reported daily use of illegal drugs in the month before the current offense. Only drug offenses such as possession or trafficking had a similar percentage committed by a person who was under the influence or a daily user of drugs. Nonetheless, significant proportions of those convicted of violent crimes not associated with monetary gain were also under the influence of drugs at the time of the offense--for example, 28.6% of those convicted of assault and 32% of those convicted of rape.

Table 4. Likelihood of major drug use for State prison inmates, by offense, 1986

Conviction offense*	Percent of inmates who had used a major drug daily in the month before the current offense
All offenses	18.6%
Drug offenses	30.1%
Property offenses	21.8
Violent offenses	15.6
Public-order offenses	13.0
Other offenses	7.8
Drug possession	30.8%
Drug trafficking	30.0
Other drug offenses	25.9
Larceny	24.9
Burglary	23.3
Robbery	22.9
Kidnaping	20.5
Fraud	18.9
Auto theft	16.9
Stolen property	16.2
Other violent offenses	16.0
Other public-order offenses	13.9
Arson	13.5
Murder	12.3
Assault	11.2
Weapons	10.5
Manslaughter	9.2
Rape	9.2
Other property offenses	8.6
Sexual assault	6.2

Note: Major drugs include cocaine, heroin, PCP, LSD, and methadone.
*Most serious offense for which the inmate was sentenced to prison.

Table 5. Major drug use history of State prison inmates, by current offense, 1986

Conviction offense*	Percent of all inmates who: Never used a major drug	Used a major drug: Anytime in the past	Used a major drug: Regularly in the past	In the month before the offense: At all	In the month before the offense: Daily
All offenses	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Violent offenses	60.1%	52.6%	50.0%	52.0%	45.7%
Murder	13.5	10.0	9.9	10.7	7.4
Manslaughter	4.2	3.0	2.8	2.2	1.6
Rape	5.6	4.0	3.0	3.2	2.1
Sexual assault	6.6	3.7	3.5	1.5	1.5
Robbery	18.6	22.0	19.7	22.8	25.7
Assault	9.1	7.6	8.6	9.9	4.9
Kidnaping	1.6	1.8	1.9	1.5	1.9
Other violent offenses	1.0	.7	.7	.3	.7
Property offenses	28.6%	30.6%	34.5%	28.1%	38.5%
Burglary	14.3	17.5	17.8	16.3	20.7
Arson	.8	1.3	.5	.3	.5
Auto theft	1.5	1.2	1.7	1.0	1.3
Fraud	4.2	2.7	4.4	2.8	3.9
Larceny	5.4	5.0	7.2	5.3	8.1
Stolen property	1.9	2.1	2.3	2.2	1.7
Other property offenses	.6	.7	.6	.2	.2
Drug offenses	4.7%	11.2%	8.7%	15.1%	13.9%
Possession	1.3	4.3	3.1	5.3	4.8
Trafficking	3.2	6.4	5.1	9.3	8.7
Other drug offenses	.1	.5	.4	.5	.4
Public-order offenses	5.8%	4.9%	6.3%	4.1%	3.6%
Weapons	1.7	1.2	2.0	1.3	.8
Other public-order offenses	4.1	3.7	4.3	2.8	2.8
Other offenses	.9%	.7%	.5%	.7%	.3%

Note: Major drugs include cocaine, heroin, PCP, LSD, and methadone. Percents may not add to totals because of rounding.
*Most serious offense for which the inmate was sentenced to prison.

Table 6. Seriousness of drug use and age of onset for State prison inmates, by type of drug, 1986

Type of drug	Percent of all inmates who: Had ever used drugs	Had used drugs regularly	Median age of first: Use	Regular use
Any drug	79.6%	62.4%	15 yrs	15 yrs
Major drug	52.4%	35.1%	17 yrs	18 yrs
Cocaine	43.9	22.2	19	20
Heroin	25.2	16.9	18	18
PCP	16.2	5.6	17	17
LSD	22.2	8.3	16	16
Methadone	7.8	2.6	19	19
Other drug	78.0%	57.8%	15 yrs	15 yrs
Marijuana or hashish	76.0	54.5	15	15
Amphetamines	30.4	16.2	16	17
Barbiturates	37.1	11.9	16	16
Methaqualone	23.0	7.9	17	17
Other drugs	15.4	7.9	17	17

The association of drug use with specific crimes is more evident if only daily use of a major drug is examined. Again, as in the measures above based on any drug use, persons incarcerated for crimes for gain were more likely than others to report using a major drug on a daily basis (table 4). Other than those convicted of drug offenses, inmates whose current offense was larceny, burglary, robbery, or kidnaping most frequently reported daily use. Fully a fourth of all the inmates who had used a major drug daily in the month before the offense had been convicted of robbery, and another fifth of burglary (table 5).

Drug use history and past criminal activity

The self-reports of inmates regarding the onset of drug use and regular use indicate that such use usually began in the middle-to-late teens. The median age of inmates at the time of the survey was 28 years. For the nearly 80% of inmates who reported having used an illegal drug at some time in the past, the median age of first use was 15 years (table 6). Further, for the 62.4% who reported using a drug on a regular basis in the past, the median age of regular use was also 15. More than half reported having used a major drug, and more than a third did so regularly. For these inmates, the median age of first use was 17 years, and the median age of first regular use of a major drug was 18.

A comparison of the median age at which drug use commenced and the median age of the first criminal justice contact indicates that, on average, use of any drug preceded first arrest, probation, or incarceration. While drug use and regular drug use began at about age 15, arrests, probations, and incarcerations first took place between the ages of 16 and 19 (table 7). First use of a major drug tended to occur several years after use of any drug--17-18 years old. There was little difference between racial groups on most of these measures. The exception was use of major drugs, which occurred about 2 years earlier for whites than blacks. First criminal justice contacts tended to occur 3-4 years later among females than males.

In the month before the offense for which they were first incarcerated, inmates had often begun using illegal drugs. More than 50% of all inmates reported they had used drugs just before their first incarceration, and 36.9% reported regular use (table 8). However, use of a major drug just before their first incarceration was much less prevalent: 22.7% had used a major drug just prior to their first incarceration, and 13.8% had used a major drug regularly in that time. Females were more likely and whites slightly more likely to report major use just prior to first incarceration.

Temporal sequence of drug use and first arrest

For most inmates in State prison, their first criminal justice contact was an arrest. Based on the year of their first arrest and their reports of the age at which they first used drugs, a sequence of these events can be reconstructed. Nearly half of the inmates appear to have had their first experiences with drugs before their first arrest: 38.7% reported that they first used an illegal drug more than a year before, and another 8.1% the year before their first arrest (table 9). Regular use was lower, but a third of inmates still reported regular use of an illegal drug a year or more before their first arrest.

Major drug use before first arrest, however, was less common. Only about 11% of inmates reported regular use of a major drug a year or more before their first arrest, compared to 65.1% who reported never regularly using major drugs and 20.7% whose regular use of a major drug began a year or more after their first arrest. This finding, of drug use beginning before but major use developing after the beginning of a criminal career, is consistent with other research in this area.[7]

[7]See B. Green, "Examination of the Relationship Between Crime and Substance Use in a Drug/Alcohol Treatment Population," International Journal of Addiction, vol. 16 (1981), pp. 627-645; J. Incardi, The War on Drugs: Heroin, Cocaine, Crime, and Public Policy (Palo Alto, Calif.: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1986).

Table 7. Median age at first criminal justice contact and at first drug use for State prison inmates, 1986

	Median age					
	All inmates	Race			Sex	
		White	Black	Other	Male	Female
Criminal justice contacts						
First arrest	17 years	17 years	17 years	17 years	17 years	20 years
First probation	16	16	16	16	16	20
First incarceration	19	19	19	19	19	23
First drug use						
Any drug						
First use	15 years	14 years	15 years	14 years	15 years	16 years
First regular use	15	15	16	15	15	16
Major drug*						
First use	17 years	16 years	18 years	16 years	17 years	18 years
First regular use	18	17	19	18	18	19

*Major drugs include cocaine, heroin, PCP, LSD, and methadone.

Table 8. Drug use prior to first incarceration, by race and sex, for State prison inmates, 1986

	Percent of all inmates who reported using drugs in the month prior to the offense that resulted in their first incarceration					
	All inmates	Race			Sex	
Type of drug use		White	Black	Other	Male	Female
Any drug						
Any use	50.7%	52.4%	49.3%	47.0%	50.8%	47.8%
Regular use	36.9	39.5	34.5	32.6	36.9	36.8
Major drug*						
Any use	22.7%	24.9%	20.6%	18.4%	22.3%	29.9%
Regular use	13.8	14.6	13.3	10.0	13.5	21.6

*Major drugs include cocaine, heroin, PCP, LSD, and methadone.

Table 9. Onset of drug use in relation to first arrest for State prison inmates, 1986

	Percent of inmates who began using drugs:						
		Before first arrest		In same year as first arrest	After first arrest		
Type of drug use	All	More than 1 year	One year		One year	More than 1 year	No such use reported[a]
Any drug							
First use	100%	38.7%	8.1%	10.6%	5.1%	16.7%	20.7%
First regular use	100	26.1	6.4	8.3	4.8	16.6	37.8
Major drug[b]							
First use	100%	14.8%	4.5%	6.0%	4.5%	22.2%	48.0%
First regular use	100	8.0	2.7	3.5	3.0	17.7	65.1

Note: Percents may not add to 100 because of rounding.
[a]The amounts in this column differ from those in table 2 because of differences in coverage between the two tables.
[b]Major drugs include cocaine, heroin, PCP, LSD, and methadone.

The beginning of regular use of drugs relative to first arrest varied slightly by race and sex. Whites were somewhat more likely than blacks to begin regular use of any drug (29.1% vs. 22.9%) and regular use of a major drug (9.9% vs. 6.1%) more than a year prior to their first arrest (table 10). Females were also somewhat more likely than males to report regular use before their first arrest. Again, a majority of all racial groups and both males and females reported either no regular use or said they did not begin regular use until after their first arrest.

The sequence of events can be clarified by examining only those inmates who reported a particular type and level of drug use. For example, among the approximately 355,000 inmates who reported ever having used a drug, well over half clearly did so well before their first arrest (table 11). A similar pattern exists among the approximately 279,000 inmates who reported having used any drug regularly.

The pattern changes, however, when only users of major drugs are examined. An estimated 233,000 of the inmates in State prison in 1986 had used a major drug, but more than half reported that they had not done so until after their first arrest. Of those who had used a major drug regularly, nearly three-fifths reported that such use began after their first arrest--50.8% not until more than a year after.

These results imply that the pathway into a criminal career or to the regular use of drugs may take various forms. One group of prisoners reported that they had begun using drugs regularly before they were first arrested (32.5%, table 9). However, many inmates in this group had apparently not used any of the major drugs regularly until after that first arrest. A second group of inmates developed regular drug habits, but only after their criminal careers had already begun (21.4%). Finally, a third group reported no regular use of illegal drugs. Among the entire population, 37.8% said they had never used any drug regularly, and 65.1% reported that they had never used a major drug regularly.

Table 10. Onset of regular drug use, by race and sex, for State prison inmates, 1986

Type of regular drug use	All	Percent of inmates who began using drugs regularly: Before first arrest: More than 1 year	Before first arrest: One year	In same year as first arrest	After first arrest: One year	After first arrest: More than 1 year	No such use reported[a]
Any drug							
Race							
White	100%	29.1%	6.2%	8.8%	4.8%	15.1%	35.9%
Black	100	22.9	6.5	7.8	4.8	18.3	39.7
Other	100	26.4	6.8	8.5	4.9	14.3	39.0
Sex							
Male	100%	26.0%	6.4%	8.3%	4.9%	16.8%	37.5%
Female	100	28.4	5.9	8.1	3.1	10.8	43.6
Major drug[b]							
Race							
White	100%	9.9%	2.9%	4.3%	3.8%	17.4%	61.9%
Black	100	6.1	2.5	2.7	2.3	18.0	68.4
Other	100	6.8	1.5	4.2	2.8	18.7	66.0
Sex							
Male	100%	7.9%	2.6%	3.4%	2.9%	17.9%	65.3%
Female	100	10.9	3.9	6.0	3.2	15.2	60.8

Note: Percents may not add to 100 because of rounding.
[a]The amounts in this column differ from those in table 2 because of differences in coverage between the two tables.
[b]Major drugs include cocaine, heroin, PCP, LSD, and methadone.

Table 11. Onset of drug use in relation to first arrest for drug-using State prison inmates, 1986

When drug use began	Percent of drug-using inmates who used: Any drug: Ever	Any drug: Regularly	A major drug*: Ever	A major drug*: Regularly
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Before first arrest				
More than 1 year	48.8%	42.0%	28.5%	22.9%
One year before	10.3	10.3	8.8	7.6
In same year as first arrest	13.4%	13.4%	11.5%	10.2%
After first arrest				
One year after	6.5%	7.8%	8.7%	8.5%
More than 1 year	21.0	26.8	42.7	50.8
Number of cases	355,285	278,864	233,038	156,386

Note: Percents may not add to 100 because of rounding.
*Major drugs include cocaine, heroin, PCP, SD, and methadone.

Table 12. Daily use of major drugs for State prison inmates, by conviction offense, 1986

Type of drug use and conviction offense	Percent of all inmates
Daily use of a major drug in the month before the offense	
No	81.4%
Yes	18.6%
Conviction offense for daily users:	
Crimes for gain	13.0%
Robbery	4.8
Burglary	3.8
Drug trafficking	1.6
Larceny	1.5
Other property offenses	1.3
Violent offenses*	3.7%
Other	1.8%

Note: Percents may not add to totals because of rounding.
*Excluding robbery.

Hard-core drug use and crime

It is often assumed that drug addicts, seeking money to support their habits, commit a great many crimes. Although the inmate survey of 1986 did not contain a specific question regarding drug addiction, it did collect information on the type of behavior most likely to characterize drug addiction: daily use of a major drug. About four-fifths of all inmates were not, according to their self-reports, daily users of a major drug in the month before their current offense (table 12). Of the 18.6% who were, most (13% of all inmates) were convicted of a crime for gain such as robbery (4.8%) or burglary (3.8%). Thus, just under a seventh of State prison inmates in 1986 seem to fit the pattern of drug addicts who committed crimes for gain. From the data available it is not possible to determine to what extent the proceeds from these crimes were used to support a drug habit.

Although daily users of major drugs were a minority of the inmate population in 1986, they may have been responsible for a disproportionate share of crimes. Field research with addicts has shown that they do commit crimes with a greater frequency than do nonaddicts.[8] Moreover, data from the inmate survey show that the degree of major drug use is related to the number of prior convictions: the greater the use of major drugs, the more prior convictions the inmate was likely to report (table 13). For example, more than a fourth of inmates who had never used a major drug had no prior conviction, compared to about a tenth of daily users. Moreover, less than 13% of nonusers had six or more prior convictions, compared to nearly 30% of daily users. Most of those who had used a major drug regularly in the past, in the month before the offense, or daily in that month had three or more prior convictions.

[8] J. Ball et al., "The Day-to-Day Criminality of Heroin Addicts in Baltimore--A Study in the Continuity of Offense Rates," Drug and Alcohol Dependence, vol. 12 (1983), pp. 119-142; B. Johnson et al., Taking Care of Business, The Economics of Crime by Heroin Abusers (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1985).

Table 13. Major drug use history and convictions for State prison inmates, 1986

Convictions	Percent of all inmates who: Never used a major drug	Used a major drug: Anytime in the past	Regularly in the past	In the month before the offense: At all	Daily
Prior convictions					
As a juvenile only	10.7%	13.3%	8.3%	11.0%	9.5%
As an adult only	37.0	33.2	38.7	30.7	35.9
Both as a juvenile and as an adult	26.6	37.2	44.2	44.3	45.4
Number of prior convictions					
None	25.7%	16.4%	8.8%	14.0%	9.2%
1	22.8	19.9	16.8	17.2	14.8
2	16.6	17.4	16.7	13.8	16.1
3-5	22.3	26.8	31.4	28.9	30.4
6-10	8.8	13.5	16.5	15.2	18.2
11 or more	3.7	6.0	9.8	10.9	11.3

Note: Major drugs include cocaine, heroin, PCP, LSD, and methadone.

Table 14. Employment by major drug use history for State prison inmates, 1986

Employment status in year before incarceration	Percent of all inmates who: Never used a major drug	Used a major drug: Anytime in the past	Regularly in the past	In the month before the offense: At all	Daily
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Employed	73.4%	67.9%	67.5%	67.0%	60.0%
Full-time	61.6	54.5	56.7	59.0	49.5
Part-time	11.8	13.3	10.8	10.0	10.6
Unemployed	26.6%	32.1%	32.5%	31.0%	40.0%
Looking for work	16.5	19.8	18.9	16.9	19.8
Not looking for work	10.1	12.4	13.7	14.1	20.2

Note: Major drugs include cocaine, heroin, PCP, LSD, and methadone. Percents may not add to totals because of rounding.

Table 15. Income source by major drug use history for State prison inmates, 1986

Source of income	Percent of all inmates who: Never used a major drug	Used a major drug: Anytime in the past	Regularly in the past	In the month before the offense: At all	Daily
Wages or salaries	85.3%	85.2%	83.3%	84.5%	77.3%
Benefits	22.3	21.4	25.9	22.1	22.8
Family or friends	23.3	30.5	25.1	29.6	30.5
Illegal income	9.6	23.4	27.9	35.5	47.6
Other income source	4.0	4.0	4.1	3.0	3.8

Note: Income source refers to any source of income during the year before the current incarceration. Percents add to more than 100 because more than one source of income could be mentioned by each inmate.

Drug use and employment

The impact of a regular drug habit on the addict's ability to maintain a legitimate income as well as the high cost of many illegal drugs may incline addicts to engage in criminal activity for funds to support their habits. According to the inmate reports, users of major drugs, especially daily users, were least likely to have been employed and most likely to have been both unemployed and not seeking work (table 14). Further, users of major drugs were substantially more likely than nonusers to report that they received income from illegal activities during the time they were last free (table 15). While less than 10% of those who never used a major drug reported illegal income, 47.6% of daily users of a major drug said they had received some part of their income from illegal sources.

Drug treatment programs

A final issue in the area of drug use and crime is the potential role of treatment intended to stop addiction or abuse. Inmates in 1986 were asked if, in their own view, they had ever been dependent on a drug in the past; 27.8% said that they had (table 16). The median age given by inmates for their first drug dependency was 18 years. The two most commonly discussed major drugs, cocaine and heroin, were also the most often identified as the illegal drug of dependency. However, inmates were almost as likely to report a dependency on marijuana or hashish (8.8%) as on cocaine (10%). Consistent with other results reported above, dependency was more commonly reported by white inmates than others and was more likely among females than males.

About 3 in 10 inmates had participated in a treatment program (table 17). Many of these inmates had been in treatment more than once--11.7% of the total inmate population had been treated two or more times. About half of those who had ever been in treatment had received their most recent treatment while incarcerated; 6.2% of inmates were in treatment at the time of the survey.

Methodology

The survey of State prison inmates is designed and sponsored by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, with data collection carried out by the Bureau of the Census. The sample design employed is a stratified two-stage selection with the probabilities proportional to the size of the correctional facility. The sample is selected independently from two frames, one for males only and a second to allow an oversample of females. Within each frame, facilities are stratified by type (prison versus community corrections facility) and by census region. In the second stage, interviewers visit each selected facility and select a sample of inmates using predetermined sampling procedures. In 1979, 11,397 interviews were conducted at 215 prisons with a selected sample of about 12,000. In 1986, 13,711 interviews were conducted at 275 facilities from a sample of about 15,000.

Based on these interviews, estimates of the entire inmate population were developed that used a weighting factor derived from the original probability of selection in the sample. This factor was then adjusted for variable rates of nonresponse and with two different ratio adjustments. The first accounts for sample effects; the second is intended to bring the sample population as closely into agreement as possible with the known distribution of the entire inmate population. All comparisons presented in this report are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Drug use history is based directly on the responses from inmates. In the interview, inmates were asked a very detailed set of questions about each of 10 drugs. Drug use histories were developed by examining the responses to all of the 10 sets of questions. The drugs that were specifically asked about were heroin or methadone, amphetamines and barbiturates (alone or in combination), methaqualone (Quaaludes), cocaine, LSD, PCP, and marijuana or hashish. Previous methodological research indicates that the self-reports of drug users are a reliable source of information on past drug use.[9]

[9]See J. Ball, "The Reliability and Validity of Interview Data Obtained from 59 Narcotic Drug Addicts," American Journal of Sociology, vol. 72 (1967), pp. 650-654; T. Cox and B. Longwell, "Reliability of Interview Data Concerning Current Heroin Use from Heroin Addicts on Methadone," International Journal of Addiction, vol. 9 (1974), pp. 161-165; Z. Amsel et al., "Reliability and Validity of Self-Reported Illegal Activities and Drug Use Collected from Narcotic Addicts," International Journal of Addiction, vol. 11 (1976), pp. 325-336.

Table 16. Past drug dependency by race and sex for State prison inmates, 1986

Drug use dependency	Percent of all inmates					
	All inmates	Race			Sex	
		White	Black	Other	Male	Female
Ever dependent on drugs in past	27.8%	31.6%	23.7%	28.3%	27.4%	35.8%
Major drug*	20.4%	22.2%	18.6%	18.4%	20.0%	28.3%
Cocaine	10.0	10.4	9.6	9.2	9.8	13.7
Heroin	13.6	14.1	13.1	11.4	13.2	22.0
PCP	1.7	2.2	1.1	2.0	1.7	1.5
LSD	1.5	2.7	.3	1.9	1.6	.6
Methadone	1.2	1.7	.6	1.2	1.1	2.9
Other drug	14.5%	18.6%	9.9%	17.8%	14.4%	16.1%
Marijuana or hashish	8.8	10.3	7.1	11.9	9.0	5.9
Amphetamines	4.8	7.7	1.7	6.2	4.8	6.4
Barbiturates	3.4	5.3	1.4	5.1	3.4	5.2
Methaqualone	1.3	2.1	.5	1.9	1.3	1.7
Others	1.4	2.2	.5	1.9	1.3	2.3

Note: Dependency data, like drug use data, are based on self-reports by inmates. Percents may add to more than totals because more than one drug could be mentioned by each inmate.
*Major drugs include cocaine, heroin, PCP, LSD, and methadone.

Table 17. Participation in drug treatment programs for State prison inmates, 1986

Extent of program participation	Percent of all inmates
Ever participated in a treatment program	29.6%
Number of times in treatment	
Once	17.7%
Twice	6.5
3-5 times	4.3
6 or more times	.9
In a program in the month before current offense	3.7%
Most recent treatment was while incarcerated	15.7%
Currently in treatment	6.2%

The Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs, coordinates the activities of the following program offices and bureaus: the Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Institute of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and the Office for Victims of Crime.

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July 1988, NCJ-111940

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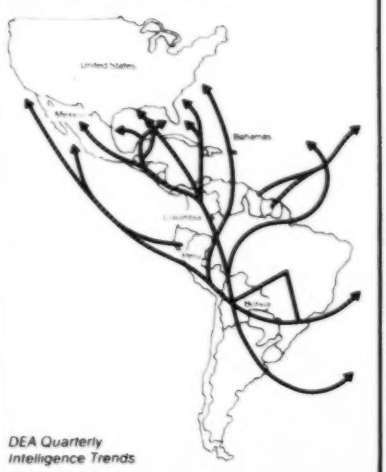

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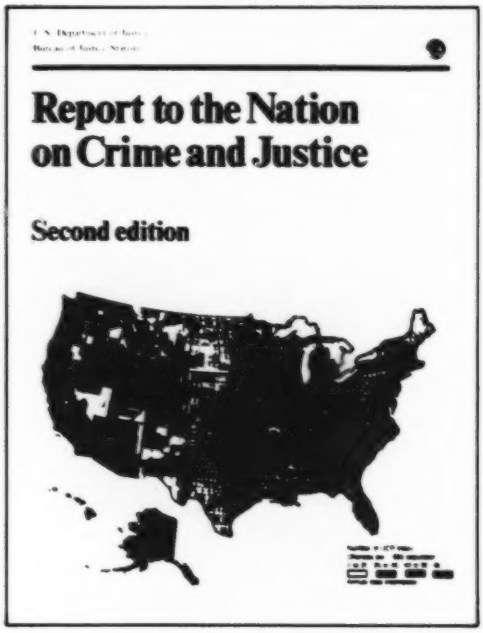

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